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ABSTRACT

The limited coverage of blacks in "The Virginia Gazette" during integration marked a symbolic step toward greater, or equal inclusion of black society in the newspaper but proved far from fulfilling the newspaper's role as a community newspaper. Personal interaction between blacks and whites in Williamsburg (Virginia) did not occur very often, and black views on integration appeared sparingly in the press. The full integration and achievement of racial parity in public schools did not happen in many localities throughout Virginia until the late 1960s because the courts had to decide on the constitutionality of school busing, and full integration was not realized in many districts until the fall of 1968. "The Virginia Gazette" affords little reference to integration until that year. The pattern of stories, people, and issues covered in 1968 as well as the testimony of former editors and writers at the newspaper revealed a similar marginalization of blacks in the newspaper as well as an unmistakable desire to cater to the interests of whites. Ten news stories and two editorials printed in the weekly publication between March 1, 1968 and December 13, 1968 were related to or partially addressed integration. In-depth coverage of the issues relating to the effects of integration on black society failed to occur, and the claim of objectivity on the part of the newspaper staff's coverage of integration was not substantiated from the analysis. The sympathies and interests of the newspaper staff resided with the white community, and news stories invariably focus on issues and happenings that were of concern to that community. (CK)

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A Voice for White Society:

The Role of "The Virginia Gazette" during School Integration

Paul Olson
January 5, 1993

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A Voice for White Society: The Role of *The Virginia Gazette* During School Integration

Recalling the pervasive attitude during the 1960s of whites towards blacks in Williamsburg, Virginia, former black teacher Madeline Gee said, "The idea over the years has been that black schools weren't as good as white schools and that black teachers couldn't teach . . . But Bruton Heights proved differently right here in this town. It's just that nobody bothered to come over and look."[1] The fact that whites ignored the successes of black schools such as Bruton Heights is not surprising considering that segregated schools functioned as an extension of a segregated society. Like many Southern towns of the era, Williamsburg was one community divided into two societies, one for whites and one for blacks. Personal interaction between whites and blacks did not occur very often.

When Evageline Davis arrived in Williamsburg in 1967 and took over as managing editor of The Virginia Gazette, the town's weekly newspaper, she hoped to make the newspaper more responsive to the community. A veteran journalist with twenty years of experience, she aspired to professional standards of objectivity. Her predecessors at the Gazette, like the members of the white society of which she now found herself a part, had consistently ignored blacks in the newspaper. In 1968, when both white and black societies faced the problem of integration and were forced to interact personally on a large scale for the first time, Davis had the opportunity to fulfill her newspaper's "mission" as a true community newspaper, representative of the voices of all Williamsburg citizens. But, faced with an unresponsive publisher, a news staff supposedly consisting of "housewives" and "college students," and a town firmly entrenched in a tradition of segregation, Davis failed to alter the newspaper's role as a voice for a closed white society.[2] Black views on integration appeared sparingly in the press, and the Gazette fell well short of fulfilling its responsibility as a community newspaper.

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[1] Claire Fortier, "Segregation Integration Eroded Education and Business," The Virginia Gazette 6 Feb. 1988: 1.

[2] Evageline Davis, personal interview, 21 Nov. 1992.

Perhaps the greatest test to the integrity of the American Union since the Civil War came in 1954 when the Supreme Court outlawed segregation in public schools. Known as Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka, the decision held that separate educational facilities for whites and blacks are "inherently unequal" and violate the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution, which provides all citizens with equal protection under the law. Writing for the unanimous court, Chief Justice Earl Warren said, "In the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place." By usurping individual state control over public education, the ruling effectively nullified many state constitutional provisions requiring or allowing segregation of white and black children in public schools. In a later 1955 ruling, the Court requested local courts to require "a prompt and reasonable start toward full compliance" with the decision and said that local administration problems should be resolved "with all deliberate speed."[3] Southern states, of course, vehemently opposed the call to integrate. Viewing the call to integrate as an encroachment on their right to control the organization and administration of public schools, Virginia launched a program of "Massive Resistance" to the ruling and even considered the possibility of seceding from the Union. During the height of Virginia's campaign against compliance with the Supreme Court ruling, the State's General Assembly passed a series of statutes in 1956 and '57 requiring the governor to close any public school that was under court order to integrate and to cut off state funds to any school that moved to reopen in obedience to similar orders. By the fall of 1958 Virginia's "Massive Resistance" program resulted in the state shutdown of white schools in Norfolk, Front Royal (Warren County), and Charlottesville. Despite Governor J. Lindsay Almond, Jr.'s continued staunch defiance of the Supreme Court ruling, the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals and a Norfolk federal court on January 19, 1959, struck down the state's school closing laws. With little fanfare

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[3] Ayers, Allan. Integration in the South (New York: MacMillan and Co., 1974) 283-84.

or disorder twenty-one blacks entered various white public schools across the state on February 2, 1959.[4]

Full integration and the achievement of racial parity in public schools did not occur in many localities throughout Virginia until the late 1960s because courts had to decide on the constitutionality of school busing. Unlike many states both in the South and North where violence accompanied the process towards full integration, Virginia made the transition relatively smoothly. Between 1954 and 1970 when full integration became a reality in all of America, Virginia was the only state on the Atlantic seaboard from Florida to Massachusetts where the National Guard did not have to be called out to suppress disturbances associated with integration. With the exception of a few notable localities like Prince Edward County which refused to comply with the integration until 1963, integration was an uneventful, innocuous occurrence in most Virginia towns. Williamsburg functions as an interesting and easily manageable case study of how one Southern town came to terms and struggled with the issue of public school integration. The Virginia Gazette, the town's weekly publication and the nation's oldest newspaper founded in 1736, offers the only written chronicle of this process in Williamsburg. Since full integration was not realized in many public school districts in Virginia until fall 1968, the Gazette affords little reference to the issue until that year. As a result, this study will concentrate on the newspaper's treatment of the issue solely during the year 1968.

Writing in "The County Newspaper" the renowned editor and publisher of The Emporia Gazette William Allen White said, "The newspaper is more than the voice of the country-town spirit; the newspaper is in a measure of the will of the town . . . It is the bringing together of the threads of the town's life . . . that reveals us to ourselves"[5] In 1968 The Virginia Gazette was in an ideal position to fulfill a role as the "voice" and

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[4] Wilford Kale and Harry Smith, Davis Y. Paschall: A Study in Leadership, (Richmond, Va.: The Dietz Press, 1990) 18-53.

[5] Sally Foreman Griffith, Home Town News: William Allen White and the *Emporia Gazette* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 182, 159.

"incarnation" of the spirit of Williamsburg.[6] While the Newport News, Va., Daily Press had a Williamsburg bureau, it functioned more as a regional newspaper, devoting the majority of its coverage to happenings in Norfolk, Hampton, and Richmond. The Virginia Gazette, on the other hand, devoted its pages primarily to coverage of events and issues concerning the 9,069 residents of Williamsburg City proper and the 17,853 residents of surrounding James City County. A broadsheet published every Friday, the post office delivered the newspaper to the Gazette's roughly 6,000 readers. Subscription rates ranged from $3.50 per year for area residents and $4.00 per year for all other persons within the continental United States. Various newsstands around the area also sold the Gazette for ten cents. Approximately twenty pages in length, the newspaper devoted the first page to a series of interesting and whimsical extracts from past Virginia Gazettes. The second page consisted primarily of "hard" news which continued on several interior pages. Editorials and Letters to the Editor composed the third page, sports covered the following two to four pages, and various feature articles were interspersed among the several succeeding pages. In addition to the "staples" such as obituaries and classifieds, the Gazette devoted considerable space to wedding announcements and especially its genealogy column. Many out-of-town readers supposedly subscribed to the Gazette because of these pages.

The staff in 1968 consisted of a montage of diverse persons, several of whom worked at the paper part-time. Publisher and editor-in-chief John Gravely III, son of a prominent Richmond businessman, had no prior experience in journalism before acquiring the newspaper in 1966. Managing editor Evageline Davis had previously worked for highly acclaimed editor Ralph McGill at The Atlanta Constitution as the nation's first female sports writer, a reporter for wire news services in China and Japan, and also writer for Harper's Review. She arrived in Williamsburg and began working for the paper in 1967 after her husband Burke Davis, an author and historian, assumed his new job as speech writer for Colonial Williamsburg President Humelsine. The remaining core of reporters,

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[6] Griffith 159.

whom Davis described as an assortment of "inexperienced housewives" Gravely insisted on employing, included Barbara Ball and Tina Jeffrey. Ball, who had worked for a daily newspaper in Florida before coming to Williamsburg, wrote a variety of articles but only worked part-time in order to take care of her school-aged children. Although Jeffrey had previous journalism experience, she likewise worked at the Gazette part-time for the sake of her family. Stuart Spirn, a law student and former writer for the College of William and Mary student newspaper The Flat Hat, wrote sports and features full-time for the newspaper during the summer of 1968 and part-time during the school year. Virginia Rollings devoted her time solely to the genealogy and wedding pages. Various other personnel, including Ken Bradby, Harry Warr, and Elwood Bizell handled advertising sales, printing, circulation, and other administrative duties.

In addition to writing most of the editorials, Davis administered the news department. Citing insufficient personnel, she did not assign her reporters specific "beats," although Ball typically covered schools and Spirn reported on local sports. As a result, Davis assigned reporters specific stories as they "fell in her lap," Spirn said, and often allowed reporters to cover events they felt were newsworthy.[7] Partly because of a lack of reporters, Davis claims she was not able to cover the community as fully as it should have been. In a November 21, 1992, interview, she said publishing a weekly newspaper is in many respects more difficult than publishing a daily mainly because it does not have access to resources such as wire services. To accommodate space, the Gazette in 1968 often relied on news releases and stories already printed in earlier editions of The Daily Press. As much as twenty percent of the articles in the Gazette, especially stories concerning Colonial Williamsburg, were rewritten or verbatim news releases. An avid golfer but aloof publisher, Gravely exercised a *laissez-faire* approach to administering the newspaper. Both Davis and Spirn said Gravely used the paper as a "toy" and a pastime between golf rounds. Davis assumed many of his duties, but still was stymied by her boss: printing of the

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[7] Stuart Spirn, personal interview, 4 Jan. 1993.

Gazette, she complained, was often delayed because somebody had to find Gravely on the golf course. More importantly, Gravely's father often had to bail the newspaper out of debt because advertising revenues were not consistently collected. Meanwhile, in her capacity as managing editor Davis allowed her reporters a marked measure of autonomy. Spirn and Ball recall that she did not regularly require stories to be rewritten.

Much like White at The Emporia Gazette, Davis assigned and wrote stories which chronicled the "doings of friends," namely the newspaper's white readers in Williamsburg.[8] In many ways, White's experience in covering the black community in Emporia, Kansas, offers a striking similarity to how Davis covered blacks in The Virginia Gazette. Described by author Sally Griffith in Home Town News as the spokesman for a particular way of life, editors of small community newspapers knew they must respond to the interests of readers to sell their product. In this way, editors White and Davis fashioned their respective newspapers to address the interests and concerns of their readership, almost exclusively white. For White, the unequal treatment of racial minorities in The Emporia Gazette stemmed from his inability to reconcile blacks with his vision of community. Set on drawing new business to the town by "boosting" Emporia's reputation and image in the newspaper, White believed creating a sense of an homogeneous community was essential; covering blacks in the newspaper imperiled this campaign. As a result, in news articles White nearly always differentiated blacks from their fellow townspeople. Creating a false sense of homogeneity through the exclusion of blacks, White reflected the way white Emporia tried to keep blacks out of sight and out of mind.[9]

The pattern of stories, people, and issues covered during 1968 as well as the testimony of former editors and writers at the Gazette reveals a similar marginalization of blacks in the newspaper as well as an unmistakable desire to cater to the interests of whites. During this period, Williamsburg City proper consisted of 7,867 white residents and 1,156

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[8] Griffith 162.
[9] Griffith 175.

black residents. James City County, on the other hand, was comprised of 11,547 whites and 6,226 blacks.[10] According to Davis, Williamsburg was the epitome of white Southern culture. "This town was really the old-time, old-fashioned South," she says. "Black housekeepers often came with homes in the city and it was common for a black nanny to raise many white children."[11] A fully integrated enterprise, at least on the surface, even before the public schools were integrated, Colonial Williamsburg employed a majority of blacks in the community. Blacks typically worked in manual labor jobs while most whites worked in administrative positions. As a result, personal interaction between the races was kept to a minimum. Moreover, despite blacks comprising nearly thirty percent of the population, Davis said whites "did not give a thought to them" before integration.[12] As managing editor of the Gazette, Davis knew she was doing the same but pled necessity as her excuse. "I regretted that when I saw blacks on the streets or at the drug store where I ate lunch that I couldn't find out what these people were doing at other times," Davis said. "But there was just no way to get an avenue into the black community to find out what was going on."[13] She added that she knew very few blacks personally. Echoing this sentiment, Spirn said he had no motivation to cover a segment of the community where he thought he was not welcomed.[14]

While admitting that she did not afford the black community equal coverage during integration, Davis claims that the Gazette's reporting was objective and not biased against blacks. "Ralph McGill taught me that when writing news, I must act as I'm in the grandstand at a stadium and report exactly what I see," Davis said. "I hate any news story where opinion comes through."[15] As a member of white Williamsburg society, however, Davis' personal association with many of the persons the Gazette covered invariably strait-

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[10] Center for Public Information, University of Virginia, 1970 United States Census Bureau figure.
[11] Davis, personal interview.
[12] Davis, personal interview.
[13] Davis, personal interview.
[14] Spirn, personal interview.
[15] Davis, personal interview.

jacketed her ability to cover the community in a balanced fashion. Amalgamating all whites or blacks in Williamsburg in two general categories called white and black society may not be fair to those who did not consider themselves specifically aligned with either society. However, taking into account that Williamsburg in 1968 served as the quintessential Southern community where the races were distinctly stratified and also that Davis used the labels herself during the personal interview, making such a generalization is necessary to understand how the Gazette functioned in the community.

Because Davis was an active member of white society, her personal associations markedly curtailed her willingness as an editor "to take on" persons in positions of power such as members of the Williamsburg City Council, James City County Board of Supervisors, Colonial Williamsburg Board of Directors, Public School Board or the vast majority of business owners in the community.[16] Therefore, in tacitly accepting the Gazette's role as a voice for white Williamsburg, which included the majority of the newspaper's readers, Davis conferred a virtually invisible status on blacks. Moreover, the fact that only five to ten percent of the newspaper's readership consisted of blacks and few black businesses advertised in the Gazette affirms sociologist Michael Schudson's conviction that newspapers are directly dependent on market forces. Newspapers, in this sense, appealed directly to "popular opinion."[17] As the printed record of coverage afforded to public school integration will illustrate, the Gazette partly did not report on blacks in a balanced fashion because many of its white subscribers likely did not expect or want it.

True to Davis' observation that whites essentially ignored blacks before integration, the Gazette rarely mentioned them before 1968. However, with full public school integration looming on the horizon, white Williamsburg was now forced to acknowledge the other thirty percent of the community. Davis believed a majority of whites in

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16 Davis, personal interview.

17 Michael Schudson, Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers (New York: Basic Books, 1978) 9.

Williamsburg were opposed to integration. The Gazette did not report any specific figure, but some parents pulled their children out of the public schools before the integrated system opened in September 1968. Despite popular local opposition to integration, Davis said that local government and the school board were committed to a peaceful transition.[18] Without incident at least one black had already enrolled in the white high school James Blair in 1966. Five months before the realization of an integrated school system the Gazette began covering the story and the transition process.

Between March 1, 1968 and Dec. 13, 1968, the weekly publication printed ten straight news stories and two editorials either related to or partially addressing integration. An examination of the manner in which the stories were reported and written reveals a characteristic exclusion of black views as well as a tone biased against them. In only three of the twelve articles are black citizens directly quoted or referred to, and practically all sources of information are drawn from white officials. Obviously, since whites held an exclusive monopoly over the local power positions, they necessarily served as the spokesmen for the community. Overt opinion is not plainly apparent in these articles, but Davis' claim that she and her staff presented news of integration objectively cannot be reconciled with the slanted view of reality offered in the articles. Before evidence can be presented to substantiate this assertion, a framework through which the objectivity of these articles can be appraised must be delineated.

In his 1978 study Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers Michael Schudson contends objectivity is more an ideal than a realistically attainable practice in journalism. An "uninsulated profession" in terms of its ability to assess news in an unbiased manner, journalism is markedly constrained by market forces and the associated necessity to appeal directly to popular opinion.[19] Schudson suggests crusading newspapers, at odds with popular consensus, were rare in the 1960s because

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[18] Davis, personal interview.
[19] Schudson 8.

editors believed they could not survive in the marketplace. As "business corporations" newspapers are required to align themselves with public opinion in order to stay financially sound.[20] In this way, newspapers cannot be objective if they are forced to stay within market-defined boundaries of coverage, reporting, and writing. For a local newspaper, such as The Virginia Gazette, its Southern white subscribers defined these boundaries of accepted coverage. Since Davis and her all-white staff adhered to the social norm of little, if any contact, with black society, they did not afford it coverage. "The slant of journalism lay not in explicit bias," Schudson says, "but in the social structure of news gathering which reinforced official viewpoints of social reality."[21] White society determined the Gazette's "social structure" through its political, economic, and social control over blacks. Recognizing a segregated community dominated by whites, the newspaper mirrored this division through its biased coverage; a segregated society produced segregated news. By acting in "collusion" with the white society, the Gazette "reproduced a vision of social reality" in Williamsburg: whites held power over local society and relegated blacks to a marginalized role in the community.[22]

Drawing upon the views of Paul Weaver and sociologist Gaye Tuchman, Schudson continues to explore the tenuousness of objectivity in journalism. He maintains that the content of a news story rests on a set of substantive political assumptions, a "mind-set" that determines the form an article assumes. Schudson says journalists never question the validity of these assumptions, which include a set of particular moral values, a belief in God, capitalism, or even racial segregation. As expressed in the typical news story, "political bias" includes descriptions generally of "conflicts" rather than "less dramatic happenings" and "events" rather than "processes." According to Weaver, this tendency results in news articles becoming stories of conflict from the exclusive point of view of

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[20] Schudson 8.
[21] Schudson 162.
[22] Schudson 160.

those parties actively engaged in it.[23] In the twelve Gazette articles related to integration, the focus is almost always on whites who seemingly are the only active participants in the transition to integration, even though blacks were equally affected. The Gazette's underlying "political assumption" that integration affects whites the most is revealed by its consistent reference to white perspectives in the articles and avoidance of black views. A similar way objectivity is jeopardized relates to the actual process of news gathering. Schudson argues journalists "strait-jacket" themselves by consistently quoting "speakers in positions of recognized authority."[24] As mentioned, Davis and the Gazette staff drew their information from these sources not only because it was the easiest way to write many stories but, more importantly, because it adhered to the socially accepted bounds of coverage. In this way, the Gazette repeatedly constructed and reinforced a selective image of reality centered on information drawn from the viewpoints of those whites in positions of power.

The premise that the Gazette served as a "mere stenographer" for the white society's "transcript of social reality" is easily verified by the twelve Gazette articles on integration published in 1968.[25] Two articles published on September 20 and December 13 dealing with problems in the schools associated with integration particularly support this claim. The first article headlined "Brown Statement To Parents On Early Problems At Berkeley" appeared buried on page 11A, typically devoted to insignificant school-related news. The article is a verbatim recitation of Brown's statement and no byline appears on it. The Gazette opens the story with a description of when the statement was read and a sentence explaining why Brown chose to read from a written text "so there would be no danger that he would be misquoted."[26] While Davis cannot recall whether the Gazette had been criticized for misquoting school administration officials, the fact that Brown, a black

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[23] Schudson 184.
[24] Schudson 185.
[25] Schudson 185.
[26] "Brown Statement To Parents On Early Problems at Berkeley," Virginia Gazette 20 Sept. 1968: 11A.

principal, expressed concern over the possibility is notable and establishes a tone of distance between the Gazette and the main agent in the article. As selected excerpts will illustrate, the fact that the article and Brown's statement appeared in the paper at all is significant.

> *Statement to Parents:* "We [the Berkeley administration] are quite aware and deeply concerned about the unpleasant situations at Berkeley during the opening of school. Each and every complaint brought to our attention was checked and doubled checked, but due to the absence of names or identifying descriptions, solution was felt to be minimal. It would have been an unhealthy feeling to brand and accuse an entire group for the actions of one or two.
>
> Upon further investigation and conference with others not involved, we learned that a mild case of "mass hysteria" was developing plus a desire to go elsewhere. This coupled with rumors and a tendency to prove pre-conceived intelligence of a school formerly designated as an all-Negro school is not a safe place to send children not in attendance before.
>
> There was one fight which occurred in two stages involving girls. This was caused because of name calling and obscene suggestion made with the hand . . . we asked witnesses to identify some these persons [involved in the fight], the reply was, they could not for they (the Negroes) all looked alike."[27]

Brown goes on to explain how the Berkeley administration patrols the school to prevent such incidents and how it has "diagnosed the situation as social adjustment rather than racial."[28] Finally, he adds an anecdote about the visit of two James Blair students during the same week who told him that "the situation would improve as soon as the students at Berkeley accepted one another as human beings and not as something to be afraid of."[29]

Considering this article is the first reference the Gazette makes to observable problems associated with integration, it marks at least the beginning of an awareness among Gazette staff and perhaps the community of difficulties associated with the newly

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[27] "Brown Statement" 11A.
[28] "Brown Statement" 11A.
[29] "Brown Statement" 11A.

integrated schools. Nevertheless, despite its obvious significance to the community, the story is placed deep in the newspaper and no follow-up stories appear in future editions at all. The bland manner in which the article is composed similarly signals the Gazette's decision not to make the story a more significant issue than it apparently was. Relying almost solely on Brown's written statement, the newspaper offers no reaction at all from parents nor attempts to delve into the matter on its own. Davis, who admits she was aware of many problems associated with integration in the schools, claims she could not report on them because sources refused to be quoted.[30] To illustrate, at the elementary school Mathew Whaley, Davis learned that several teachers were threatening to quit because black students were urinating in classrooms. Brown's reference to "mass hysteria" and the "desire to go elsewhere" also touched upon the exodus of some white children from the public school system to several private schools before the fall 1968 semester commenced. One private school, Jamestown Academy, was started that year specifically as a white response to integration of the public schools. The Gazette did not report on this at all.

The source of the information for the September 20 article coupled with its limited magnitude as a newsworthy crisis perhaps worked to keep it off the front page. The December 13 article, however, "Altercation Rocks James Blair High," appears prominently in that edition on page one. The headline in itself sparks an emotional reaction and places the event in a markedly stronger light than the earlier article. The passive voice lead, "In a fight which took place during a basketball game at James Blair High School Tuesday night two Negroes were cut with knives and hospitalized," plainly omits the person responsible for the action.[31] In the next two paragraphs, the injured blacks are identified by name but the person charged with the crime, a "white man," is not. The article continues to explain that "disturbances" followed during school on Wednesday morning apparently because, according to a deputy city sheriff, there was a misunderstanding on the part of some black

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[30] Davis, personal interview.
[31] "Altercation Rocks James Blair High," Virginia Gazette 13 Dec. 1968: 3A.

students who felt authorities had done nothing about the previous night's assault. The article says "certain whites" may have touched off the altercation because they were angry over "an instance of interracial dating."[32] Although the story does not clearly associate the disturbance with integration, everyone was probably aware that James Blair was formerly an all-white high school. In a direct appeal to these persons, the unknown author of the article writes in the second to last paragraph, "On Wednesday a number of parents took their children out of school for the day. But this precaution seemed unnecessary."[33] Once again, the Gazette turned to whites in positions of power, in this case the all-white Williamsburg City Police, for its information on the James Blair disturbance while its concluding advise further attests to the newspaper's devotion to its white readers. Griffith claims in Home Town News that White exercised considerable influence over Emporia through his choice of events which received coverage and the way in which these happenings were described. "Through his choice of language," she writes, "White affected Emporians means of thinking about the events."[34] Without doubt, Davis' placement of this story on the front page with an emotionally provocative headline and a decidedly biased focus reaffirms the differential treatment afforded blacks both in the newspaper and in the community.

In recognizing the significance of integration to the community, both Davis and reporter Ball stressed that 1968 marked the formal beginning of social contact between whites and blacks. Prior to the opening of the fall 1968 school term, a series of school board meetings occurred to discuss a variety of issues associated with integration including the new distribution of white and black pupils as well as teachers to the various schools, state tuition grants for students to attend private schools, and the possible loss of students and teachers due to integration. In covering these meetings which took place from March 8 to May 24, the Gazette devoted four articles to these topics. The structure followed the

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32 "Altercation" 3A.
33 "Altercation" 3A.
34 Griffith 180-81.

characteristic pattern of substantial reliance on white school board members for sources of information. Reporter Ball, whose byline appears on three of the stories, recalled that she wrote the stories in an impartial manner and reported only what she witnessed. Although she herself had school-aged children in the Williamsburg-James City County public schools at the time, Ball insisted that she did not allow her personal views on integration to influence how she covered the Board meetings. "I believe that the reporter and the person are two different individuals," she said. "I did not allow personal biases to influence my reporting."[35]

Ball's first story describes the discussion which took place among school board members and citizens concerning "the reorganization of the schools to achieve an equal distribution of Negro and white pupils at each grade level."[36] According to the article, disagreement arose during the meeting over whether to implement Plan One or Plan Two regarding pupil distribution at the elementary level. (Since James Blair was designated the only high school and all students would be placed there together, no planning was necessary for complete integration in grades seven through twelve.) The final vote favored Plan One calling for an overall ratio in the four different elementary schools of fifty-five percent white and forty-five percent black. Ball's selection of the remarks of one particular school member to end the story particularly highlights the sense of relief following the conclusion of this meeting. "Integration," said Mrs. Whyte, "has hung over our heads like the sword of Damocles . . . this [vote] is the end of the problem."[37] The fact that a white school member described integration as a problem and the Gazette reported it helped reinforce the common negative view that whites had of desegregation.

While the main story detailing this meeting refers only to school board members, a sidebar headlined "They Were Saying" offers the views voiced by some of the 300 citizens who attended the meeting. Ball explained that she did not incorporate them into the main

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[35] Barbara Ball, personal interview, 8 Jan. 1993.
[36] Barbara Ball, "School Boards Adopt Assignment Plan," Virginia Gazette 8 March 1968: 5A.
[37] Ball, "School Board Adopts Assignment Plan" 5A.

article because she believed they were more pointed when set off on their own.[38] A series of quotations, the side-bar proves most significant for it offers the first substantive look at community opinion on integration printed in the Gazette during 1968. Of the fifteen persons Ball quoted, four stand out for what they say, who they are, and how the reporter identifies them.

> *"You think you can avoid it (integration) but your children can't."* — a teacher from Berkeley High School.
> *"If you look under the surface you'll find it's the teachers who don't want to be integrated."*—Reverend Junius H. Moody.
> *"I would like to let parents know that students who come to this school whether they are white or Negro need not worry because teachers will view them not according to color but as students."*—Caleb Brown, principal at Berkeley High School.
> *"I have taught a 100 percent white class but I did not see color, I saw students."*—A Negro teacher.[39]

The first statement reflects what Davis described as the pervasive community opposition to integration; many white parents did not want their children attending integrated schools, but they could not avoid its inevitability. The second quotation points out the feeling among some citizens that a few teachers were opposed to integration because they did not want to leave their schools or teach black children. The two remaining statements function as assurances to white parents concerned that black teachers will not discriminate against their children in the classroom. Like all other articles related to integration, this account ignored the opinions of black parents. Clearly essential to a full understanding of how both the white and black communities responded to integration, these opinions and the issues raised are hardly explored in successive Gazette editions.

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[38] Ball, personal interview.
[39] Ball, "School Boards Adopt Assignment Plan" 5A.

Recollecting the setting of this and many other similar school board meetings, Ball said blacks regularly attended the meetings but often remained silent, likely a recognition of their "place."[40] Aside from Brown and Moody, a Baptist minister, who were reportedly among the few vocal blacks at these meetings, the Gazette rarely quoted other blacks in any of the twelve articles. In any event, Ball's identification of two of the speakers is particularly notable. Describing the person only as a "Negro teacher," Ball qualified the teacher by race because she said it was important at this meeting to show the views of both whites and blacks. Explaining why "a teacher from Berkeley High School" is not identified by race, Ball said it was assumed that a person quoted in an article was white unless indicated otherwise.[41] By identifying the teacher's race, Ball illustrates the Gazette's differentiation of blacks from whites. She also underscores the mind-set that influenced her coverage of the happening. Addressing the newspaper's white readers, Ball believed that they needed to know that a black teacher was voicing an opinion of direct concern to them. In a different way, the first marked appearance of black views on integration in the Gazette signaled a cursory acknowledgment of those 7,400 citizens in the community which the newspaper had long ignored.

Reporting on another school board meeting in the March 15 edition titled "School Boards Meet; Teacher Assignment Memo Questioned," Ball again recorded the views of some blacks (also identified by race and not name) but relies on white officials for most of her information. In a joint meeting of the Williamsburg-James City County school boards, board members and citizens discussed the plan for reassigning white and black teachers to the various elementary schools. According to the article, the criteria shaping the reassignment of the teachers included the professional needs at each school as well as racial balance. Ball writes that the Parent Teacher Association Council objected to the proposed plan at the meeting "on the grounds that full integration of faculties might not result." This

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[40] Ball, personal interview.
[41] Ball, personal interview.

opposition, a source Ball quotes in the article claims, has led to the resignation of "certain teachers."[42] The fact that some teachers decided to quit the school system because they opposed the Board's redistribution plan is significant. However, the Gazette, while falling short in gauging overall public opinion on integration, also falls short in providing any sense of the extent of teacher reaction to the proposed reassignment plan. Davis claimed teachers refused to be quoted. Nevertheless, Ball only quotes the comments of Dr. R.A. Johnston, president of the PTA Council, at the meeting. She failed to follow up on his views in its wake. Without fail, she covered the meeting with the mind-set that everything important will be publicly stated. Her complacency invariably eschews the significance of the dissatisfaction of some teachers, both white and black, with the transition to integrated schools.

In later Gazettes, specifically the March 22 and May 3 editions, the newspaper similarly avoids investigating teacher antagonism to integration to any depth. The first article, titled "Turnover of Teachers Expected To Be No Heavier, Says Wheeling," is also written by Ball. She quotes the director of personnel for the school system as predicting "no heavier than usual turnover of teachers because of the re-assignment of pupils."[43] Ball stresses Wheeling's conviction that too much emphasis had been given to teacher dissatisfaction with integration. "I think that most teachers are professionally-minded and realize the duty and need to educate all children of the area," Wheeling said.[44] Once again, Wheeling's comments hide a meaningful issue which the Gazette neglects to explore, namely the extent of teacher dissatisfaction with integration. The article begs the question of who is magnifying the supposed degree of teacher antipathy and particularly why they are doing it. Teachers and parents alike would obviously be concerned about this matter,

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[42] Barbara Ball, "School Board Meet; Teacher Assignment Memo Questioned," Virginia Gazette 15 March 1968: 3A.
[43] Barbara Ball, "Turnover of Teachers Expected To Be No Heavier, Says Wheeling," Virginia Gazette 22 March 1968: 3A.
[44] Ball, "Turnover of Teachers" 3A.

but Dr. Johnston's response to Wheeling's assertions concerning the exaggeration of teacher dissatisfaction is conspicuously absent.

Quoting Wheeling further, Ball raises the previously untouched topic of the recruitment of Negro teachers. With no mention of the views of any blacks, Ball reports in one paragraph that the local division is making "a special effort to recruit Negro teachers this year," apparently because the number of applications from blacks had been low.[45] Throughout the rest of 1968, the Gazette provides no follow-up to this matter at all, further proving the newspaper's devotion to coverage of "events" rather than "processes." Finally, at a May 3 school board meeting, the Gazette effectively lays to rest the possibility of high teacher turnover. Quoting outgoing School Superintendent M.H. Bell on his response to Dr. Johnston's previously unreported contention that the division might lose as many as forty teachers, the newspaper reports that his figure is "plenty high if not too high."[46] Once more, the Gazette does not solicit Johnston's reaction, thus producing a skewed account of the teacher dissatisfaction question.

Another facet of integration affecting both whites and blacks in different ways concerned the payment of tuition grants to pupils in private schools. The Virginia General Assembly approved the measure primarily to give whites the option of sending their children to private schools. While school boards could choose not to award the grants, the state would ultimately pay the money anyway and withhold the funds from state money allotted to the locality concerned. An April 19 Gazette article reported on a school board meeting that examined this issue, which had important "moral" ramifications for both whites and blacks. Two board members, Mrs. John Mullaney and Mrs. Martha Whyte, both implored their fellow members to adopt a "more enlightened attitude" and "oppose tuition grants."[47] Echoing this sentiment, the black Reverend J.H. Moody and "several

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[45] Ball, "Turnover of Teachers" 3A.
[46] Ball, "Turnover of Teachers" 3A.
[47] "Boards Challenged to Question State Grants To Private Schools," Virginia Gazette 19 April 1968: 3A.

others in the audience" asked the board to take a "moral stand by opposing the issue."[48] Although the final board vote approved continuation of the grants, the Gazette reporter who wrote this article (no byline is provided) chose to write the story in such a way that opponents of tuition grants are provided an overwhelming voice in the article. Only one board member, Champ Y. Powell, is quoted favoring the grants "as a safety valve by helping people who were most adamant in opposition to the changing school situation to go somewhere else."[49] The newspaper's citation of black opponents of state tuition grants chronicles the continued inclusion of at least limited black representation in articles concerning integration. In addition, by consciously giving opponents a significant say in the article even when the board approved the grants unanimously, the article's writer and conceivably Davis believed themselves in the veracity of the sentiments.

At least one news article provides an account of the process of preparing the schools for opening in September. Dated August 23, the story keenly describes how the summer move was "a mammoth undertaking."[50] In addition to offering several anecdotes concerning the transition, the Gazette reminded its white readers that the reorganization of the school system was necessary because "federal authorities termed the local system's "freedom of choice" plan of integration unacceptable."[51] No other Gazette edition during 1968 mentions this facet of integration. Originally the Williamsburg-James City County School Boards wanted to avoid bussing by organizing the distribution of pupils at the elementary schools according to neighborhoods. Because the plan did not comply with federal mandates calling for racial parity at the schools, the school system was forced to construct elementary divisions throughout the city and county which equally apportioned the races at the elementary level. As if to stress Williamsburg's compliance with full

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48 "Boards Challenged" 3A.
49 "Boards Challenged" 3A.
50 "'Moving Summer For Schools,'" Virginia Gazette 23 Aug. 1968: 2A.
51 "'Moving Summer'" 2a.

desegregation, the Gazette separates the first two sections of the story with the bold segue "Complete Integration."

Because Davis kept frank opinion out of news stories, few of the articles previously discussed offer any substantive look at the Gazette's (Davis') viewpoints on specific matters related to integration. The few editorials touching on the subject, however, present an appraisal, though somewhat limited, of Davis' attitude towards integration. Titled "Joined But Unjointed," the first editorial appeared in the March 1 edition and examined the problems of running a joint Williamsburg-James City County school system as well as those associated with the transition to an integrated system. Davis derides white parents for "scurrying around hunting for private schools as an escape from the local public school mess."[52] She then proceeds to attack the school system for its inordinate focus on achieving 50-50 integration and its neglect of the basics of education. "We think it's a lot more important that a teacher in the system knows the difference between 'principal' and 'principle' than for the class to be half-Negro, half-White."[53] Acknowledging the Gazette's support of integration, she goes on to criticize the "bunglesome school machine" for jeopardizing the quality of education it offers by perceiving students not as individuals but as a number and member of a race.

> "In the furor of presenting plans for pupil placement [and complete integration], we're treating pupils as ciphers . . . While recognizing the need for integration of the races, we do not believe that any parent, Negro or White, would be so short-sighted as to believe that an exact proportion of white-colored is more important than the best education for each child. . . Where a kid goes to school isn't all that important. What happens to him—whether he is white, black, pink, or green—when he is in that school is the only thing of importance."[54]

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[52] Evageline Davis, "Joined But Unjointed," editorial, Virginia Gazette 1 March 1968: 4A.
[53] Davis 4A.
[54] Davis 4A.

Like Gee, who contends that many blacks believed integration ultimately undermined the quality of education for their children, Davis too thinks the federal requirements for an equal distribution of the races in the schools threaten to harm the effectiveness of public education. Her passionate essay assails integration not for its moral or idealistic probity, but instead its rigidly defined guidelines for the distribution of the races. To her the actual process of integration may in the long run be more destructive to the educational system than segregation; wasting time and money on such problems as distributing pupils so that there will be no wasted space and making sure that no major alterations are needed for buildings, the school system, she says, has become distracted from its primary purpose of educating students.[55]

In an August 30 editorial titled "Hopeful Outlook," Davis renews the prospect that the school system will return to its primary mission of education now that integration has finally taken place. Pointing to the appointment of new School Superintendent Henry Renz as the dawning of a "new school day," Davis quotes a school board member who proclaims that it appears that the board "finally did something right."[56] The managing editor concludes the five paragraph editorial with an observation and a longing that seems to appeal to both whites and blacks in the community. "We don't believe the school system can withstand many more of the bumbling fiascoes of the past few years and survive. We do believe that with this obviously dedicated, inspired new administration, the school system can become what everyone wants it to be—the best possible."[57] In personal interviews, both Davis and Gee said integration, though necessary, may have done more harm than good, especially to black society. Each society, the two held, had schools catered to the needs of their people. While black schools did not have the resources at their disposal which white schools did, they had committed teachers who related to and understood the best means of instruction. Integration, both wholeheartedly agreed, drove

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[55] Davis 4A.
[56] Evageline Davis, "Hopeful Outlook," editorial, Virginia Gazette 30 Aug. 1968: 4A.
[57] Davis, "Hopeful Outlook" 4A.

whites and blacks together for the first time. However, it also left blacks with a lost sense of identity as many were forced to adapt to the culturally-biased methods of instruction in the white-controlled schools.

Davis repeatedly admitted her failure to offer any in-depth coverage of such issues relating to the effects of integration on black society. However, she remained steadfast in her conviction that her and her staff's coverage of integration was objective by 1960s standards. This analysis has repeatedly pointed out that this claim is exceedingly difficult to substantiate. Therefore, the larger rhetorical question which this inquiry inevitably prompts is: should a small-town, Southern, conservative newspaper such as The Virginia Gazette be held to such a high standard of professionalism? As Davis keenly pointed out, her entire staff consisted of an assortment of "inexperienced housewives" and "college students." She said that she could not hire "professional journalists" because her publisher did not have the money. Faced with such difficulties, Davis accepted the newspaper's limitations and covered the community, she says, "as best she could.." [58] This defeatist attitude, which Davis shares with both Ball and Spirn, signifies the most obvious reason that the managing editor acquiesced to the *status quo* at the Gazette instead of seeking an alternative way out of the newspaper's predicament. For example, with a few phone calls and more extensive investigation, several of the articles discussed could have been considerably more balanced. Nevertheless, Davis chose not to investigate the problems associated with integration, especially those that affected blacks, because she believed white society was not interested. Her mind-set and that of her staff was unquestionably shaped by their membership in white Williamsburg society. As such, their sympathies and interests naturally resided with this segment of the community and news stories invariably focused on issues and happenings that were of particular concern to them. In this impeded capacity as a journalist, Davis especially could not assume the role of a spectator in the grandstand at the sporting event and offer balanced accounts of integration because of her

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[58] Davis, personal interview.

inseparable association with and concern for white society. Taking this into account, one must therefore conclude that Davis ultimately betrayed her own standards of professionalism, especially those of objectivity, however idealistic, gleaned from her mentor McGill.

The limited coverage afforded blacks in the Gazette during integration did mark a symbolic step toward greater, or equal inclusion of black society in the newspaper, but proved far from fulfilling the newspaper's role as a community newspaper. Harold Martin in his biography Ralph McGill, Reporter likens the late editor, who strived to cover the complete story of integration in The Atlanta Constitution, to the traveler in Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken." "Each time, by some instinct," he writes, "he had chosen the hard road, the lonely road, "the road less traveled by.""[59] Unfortunately, one can not apply this allusion to Davis. She suppressed her instincts as a journalist to seek out the full story of integration, largely ignored the black community, and consequently maintained the role of the Gazette as the voice of the white community. Indeed, instead of taking "the road less traveled by," Davis and the rest of her staff took the well-traveled, narrow road paved and controlled by white society.

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[59] Harold H. Martin, Ralph McGill, Reporter (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1973) 324.

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